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SFNAATOR claims CIA trying to block probe of pope shooting  
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Sen. Alfonse D'Amato says he was shocked when officials in Rome told him the CIA was trying to discredit and block an investigation of the attempted murder of Pope John Paul II.

D'Amato, R-N.Y., charged the CIA has spread "disinformation" about the Italian investigation into a possible Soviet-Bulgarian link in the shooting of the pope in May 1981 in St. Peter's Square.

He said he was informed by a high source in Rome, whom he refused to identify, that the U.S. intelligence agency has not assigned one agent fulltime to the probe.

"It's shocking for me that the CIA has shown itself to be either inept or deliberately obstructing the investigation," D'Amato told a news conference Wednesday at Kennedy Airport upon returning from a trip to Rome to look into the shooting.

CIA spokesman Dale Peterson said today the agency would have no comment. He noted that the State Department and the White House have said the Italian investigation is an internal matter.

D'Amato said one reason for a possible coverup might be that U.S. officials want to protect relations with the Soviet Union and are afraid of finding evidence that could lead to Yuri Andropov, the former Soviet intelligence chief who is now the Soviet premier.

An Italian probe of the attack revealed a link between Turkish gunman Mehmet Ali Agca, who is charged with the shooting, and Bulgaria, a Soviet satellite country.

D'Amato said Moscow might have been concerned because the pope had threatened to go to Poland if the Soviet army invaded that country to crush the Solidarity labor movement.

The senator also said there was also speculation that the Italian investigation might compromise U.S. intelligence efforts, or bring up embarrassing matters involving trafficking in drugs and guns.

The senator was sent to Italy by the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which monitors compliance with the 1975 Helsinki accords.

D'Amato claimed that the CIA impeded his own probe by preventing "a very knowledgeable Senate aide" from accompanying him on the investigation. He charged the agency with encouraging alternate theories about the shooting, including one that Agca, was "mentally deranged" and had acted alone.

"The only information I got from our intelligence community was disinformation," he said.